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Slow the Fashion: Teaching Handcraft Techniques in Fashion and Textile Design in Higher Education

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Strategy and purpose. It has been found that textile and fashion industry is among the leading resource-consuming and polluting industries (Sahin & Odabasi, 2017) especially with the advent of fast fashion. Under the high pressure from increasing environmental problems in the world, a movement of slow fashion is gaining increasing attention. It is challenging fast fashion's obsession with mass-production and globalized style and becoming a guardian of diversity and indigenous handcraft (Hall & Boorady, 2017). Studies show that handcrafted items can evoke positive emotional bond between consumer and maker hence increase the value of a garment, which adds to the sustainability of the item through extended wear (DeLong, et.al., 2013). For designers, handcrafting nurtures their creativity as hands are subtle, sensitive, probing and closely connected to the mind (Lee & DeLong, 2017). Since designers have a lot control of products that are introduced (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015), it is significant to ensure that fashion design students are aware of the importance of sustainable fashion, and get training on sustainable design techniques for further application. Although more and more fashion schools in the world are providing sustainability education in fashion and textile design (Sahin & Odabasi, 2017), few have introduced sustainable design techniques such as handcrafting in class. To address this gap, a learning unit of handcraft manipulation of yarns and fabrics was developed and implemented in an undergraduate creative design studio class.

Implementation. The course aims to foster students' ability of creative thinking through three projects of creating wearable art. Students are encouraged to explore the creative process and sources of inspiration, to experiment on advanced design problem solving, alternative materials, fabric manipulation, and pattern-making techniques. Each project is guided by a design brief and a series of related lectures followed by a sample notebook assignment and a wearable art design. This paper reports on one of those projects that requires the incorporation of handcraft techniques. Students in this class have knowledge of apparel construction, textiles and patternmaking, and are aware of the significance of sustainability in fashion and textile industry. To help them get hand-on practice of sustainable design, first, the instructor for this project selected some handcraft techniques including crochet and knitting, embroidery and quilting, tassel and pompom making, natural dying and eco-print, and fabric manipulation for creating constructed textiles. A series of PPT lectures were developed and delivered. Most of the techniques were demonstrated and practiced in class (excluding natural dying because of the supply limitation) to reinforce learning outcomes. An assignment of creating a sample notebook (Figure 1) using the techniques

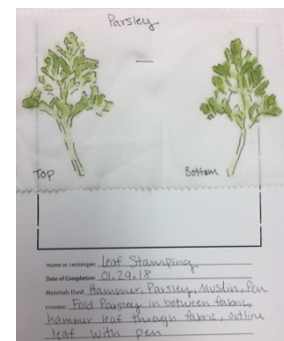


Figure 1. Sample notebook page of eco print



Figure 2. Coat with handcrafted pocket

learned from class allowed students to further explore and practice the techniques after class especially the natural dying techniques which needs a lot supplies like natural ingredients, pot, heating device, and space to operate. It also prepared students for their wearable art assignment. After the instructor finished all the lectures, students started their creative wearable art design with creating a sketchbook for capturing ideas for their design. There were three presentations in class during the design project. First, students presented their mood board to explain their inspirations and ideas about their final design, and got feedbacks from

instructor and other students for making better final decisions. Then, in half way through the garment creation process, students presented their work in progress and critique on each other so they can make appropriate adjustments if needed. Finally, students presented their completed projects in class after photographing (Figures 2 & 3), got critique and shared thoughts about the outcome of their works and possible improvements.



Figure 3. Dip dyed cape

Effectiveness of the strategy and future plans. Handcraft techniques that once resided in homes and schools are practiced and mastered by less and less new generations. The incorporation of those techniques in fashion and textile design curricula can prevent their erosion by people's obsession with fast fashion, and enhance sustainable practices in fashion. Students were so excited about having more control of the material texture, print and color, and the way they design. They enjoyed the inner peace when doing handcraft work using needles, yarns and natural dyes. The whole process was challenging with somewhat unpredictable outcomes which is the attracting parts of handcrafts – one of a kind and unreproducible. Through this project, students gained further understanding of the importance of sustainable design with hand-on practice. Given the fact that only one sustainable class is available in our department, and it is graduate level, we suggest adding more sustainability classes or class sections to the curricula for both undergraduate and graduate students to foster them think and act sustainably, so they can contribute to the building of sustainable fashion in the future.

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